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A SCHOOL PAGEANT

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In recent years the pageant has been recognized as the most popular and interesting form of entertainment to be given on a grand scale out of doors. It also has been presented very successfully on an indoor stage. This latter form has been found to be adapted especially to the secondary schools, for it possesses great educational value and appeals to the dramatic instinct of young people. Such a pageant was given recently by the students of Coburn Classical Institute in Waterville, Maine.

This pageant, which was of a historical nature, was entitled *The Progress of Civilization*. It was composed and compiled by the instructor in history, whose aim it was to make it illustrative of the history studied in school. For that purpose, scenes were selected from the ancient, the mediaeval, and the modern period which were typical of the development of civilization, and which at the same time presented dramatic possibilities or opportunities for spectacular effects. Unity was given to the whole by introducing a Spirit of Civilization, who in the prologue told of her origin, growth, and ideals, and in the concluding scene found in America hope of the fulfilment of her dreams.

The pageant was in four parts, taking up the civilization of the Greeks, the Romans, the Middle Ages, and the modern period. The first act consisted of scenes showing the rise of the Athenian power by the victory of the Greeks over the Persians. At the beginning the Greeks were represented as refusing to grant to the Persian messengers the tokens of submission—earth and water. Then the famous runner, Pheidippides, appeared upon the scene, bringing the message from the Spartans that they could not aid the Athenians before the full of the moon. With the Greek setting and the classic simplicity of the costumes, the scene seemed most realistic, and the runner thrilled his audience with the recital of Browning's masterly poem. This was followed in turn by a second appearance of

Pheidippides bearing the news of the victory of Marathon. As he shouted, "Rejoice, Athens is saved!" he fell dying, having given his life for his country.

The Delphic oracle presented material for another classic scene, foretelling the victory of Salamis through refuge in "the wooden walls." The priestess on her tripod, who in this case happened to be the teacher of classical languages, by her weird incantations showed the magic of the ancient Greek tongue.

The Greek civilization at its height was shown by two scenes representing the Pan-Athenaic Festival. The first was the procession, in which nearly all the students had a part, appearing in festive attire in the guise of stately dignitaries, members of the chorus, bearers of the robe sacred to Athena, and happy youths and maidens. As they came on the stage with music and singing, they received much applause. The second scene, representing the awarding of prizes at the festival, showed the victors in the various athletic contests, in music, and in poetry receiving the prizes of olive wreaths and oil from the trees sacred to Athena.

In the interval between the Greek and Roman scenes a group of girls gave a fancy dance called "Greek Girls Playing Ball." With their simple white gowns decorated with gold in the Greek pattern and with gilded balls, they presented a picture suggestive of all the grace and beauty of the maidens of that ancient time.

The Roman civilization was introduced by a scene from Vergil, the parting of Aeneas and Dido. This was one of the most beautiful and effective scenes. The characters were chosen for the most part from the Vergil class, and Dido showed that she had caught the real spirit of the Tyrian queen as she implored and berated the inexorable Aeneas.

Tarquin and the Sibyl showed the power of religious superstition over the Roman mind; the Vestal Virgins also revealed the religious instinct. The power of Rome in its rise and fall was pictured in the dream of Caesar on his imperial throne as he saw the characters famous in Roman story one after another pass across the stage.

The mediaeval period was ushered in by the knighting of the squire, showing some of the characteristics of the age of chivalry. The class that had been reading *Ivanhoe* and studying English his-

tory entered into this with zest. The young squire, who had been kneeling all the night before the altar, took his vows with an earnestness that made knighthood have a new meaning. As he set out for the tourney field with the favor of the Queen of Love and Beauty, he had all the audience on his side.

The power of the church during the Middle Ages was portrayed vividly as the monks, clad in gown and cowl, came in chanting the "Stabat Mater"; and later as Pope Urban at the Council of Clermont gave his ringing speech which called forth from his hearers cries of "It is the will of God," and "On to Jerusalem."

The modern period gave opportunity for a strong scene showing the Reformation when Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, being asked to renounce his faith, refused to recant. The most elaborate scene of all represented the court of Queen Elizabeth. Here the boy with a keen sense of humor proved himself an ideal jester, furnishing merriment for the courtiers until their attention was held by the entrance of Walter Raleigh with his captains and Indians, who had come from the newly settled colony in America. The knighting of Raleigh and the naming of the new land, Virginia, in honor of the Virgin Queen, served to make known the discovery of the New World.

The last scene was the grand climax, which aimed to show the ideal of civilization. The curtain arose with all the characters upon the stage and the Spirit of Civilization in the center, still seeking to find her ideal. Then the representatives of the Western nations came bringing their gifts: Greece, art; Rome, law; France, beauty; Germany, learning; England, the Magna Charta; Italy, music; and America, brotherly love symbolized by an olive branch. As each one came in appropriately dressed, the national song of that country was sung by those on the stage. The scene ended with the crowning of America by the Spirit of Civilization and the singing of our national song.

The costumes, of course, presented one of the most serious problems, as well as one of the most interesting. It was decided to make as many as possible, and the result was that only about twenty-five were hired. It became necessary to study up the dress of all these different periods and it seemed best not to trust the designing and cutting to the students themselves. Each of the women teachers

became responsible for a certain period, and under her direction the costumes worn in those scenes were cut and made. All the cutting was done at the school by a dressmaker engaged for the purpose. Those who could make their costumes, or have them made, did so. The rest were made at the school. For three weeks we had a sewing department where teachers and students gathered outside of school hours for work. Most of the material, which consisted of unbleached cotton, cheesecloth, cambric, and sateen, was purchased at wholesale and sold to the students at cost. They paid for the materials, but not the cutting. A sewing machine was put in, and even some of the boys became expert in running it. It was surprising what skill both faculty and students developed in designing sewing, and decorating during this course in dressmaking.

The stage setting was another problem, for the city opera house, where the pageant was to be given, had nothing but an out-of-door scene that could be used. Accordingly, we had two drop curtains made, one for the Greek and Roman scenes, and another for the mediaeval. We made the drops out of unbleached cotton cloth and had them painted by a local painter, who fortunately had had some experience in that kind of work. Nearly all the stage properties, too, had to be made. Had we had a manual-training department, the work might have been done there.

The business management was left to one of the teachers, but the students got experience in advertising and selling tickets. Great was their joy when they found that all the seats had been sold for the first performance.

In spite of the great amount of time put into it, the pageant did not interfere greatly with the work of the school. It is an interesting fact that the ranks for the month during which the pageant was in preparation showed fewer deficiencies than in any previous month. The members of the faculty were all of the opinion that the benefits derived more than compensated for the time and energy spent. Some of the results observed are the greater interest in history, as well as in other subjects, especially public speaking; the better understanding between students and teachers; the discovery of latent talent and the desire to develop it; the spirit of helpfulness; and, above all, a marked increase in healthy school spirit.